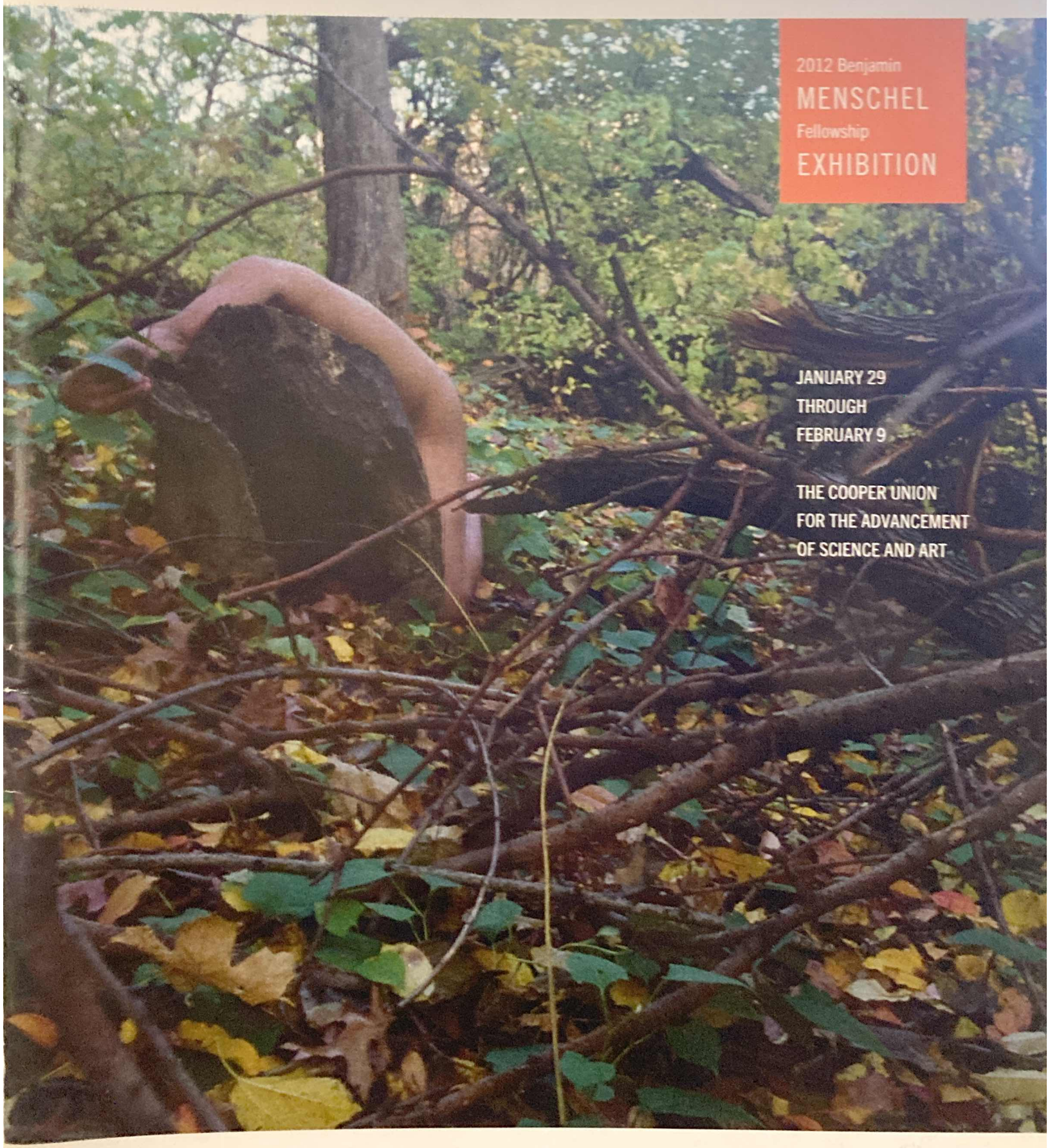


2012 Benjamin

MENSCHEL

Fellowship

EXHIBITION

JANUARY 29
THROUGH
FEBRUARY 9

THE COOPER UNION
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT
OF SCIENCE AND ART

THE SPACE BETWEEN

Somewhere in between
You and me
Is the space where I can feel
The formation of our bodies
Collide.
A new body emerges
Through the space between.
In our movements
The image of us is created
In our stillness
Our reflection can be seen.

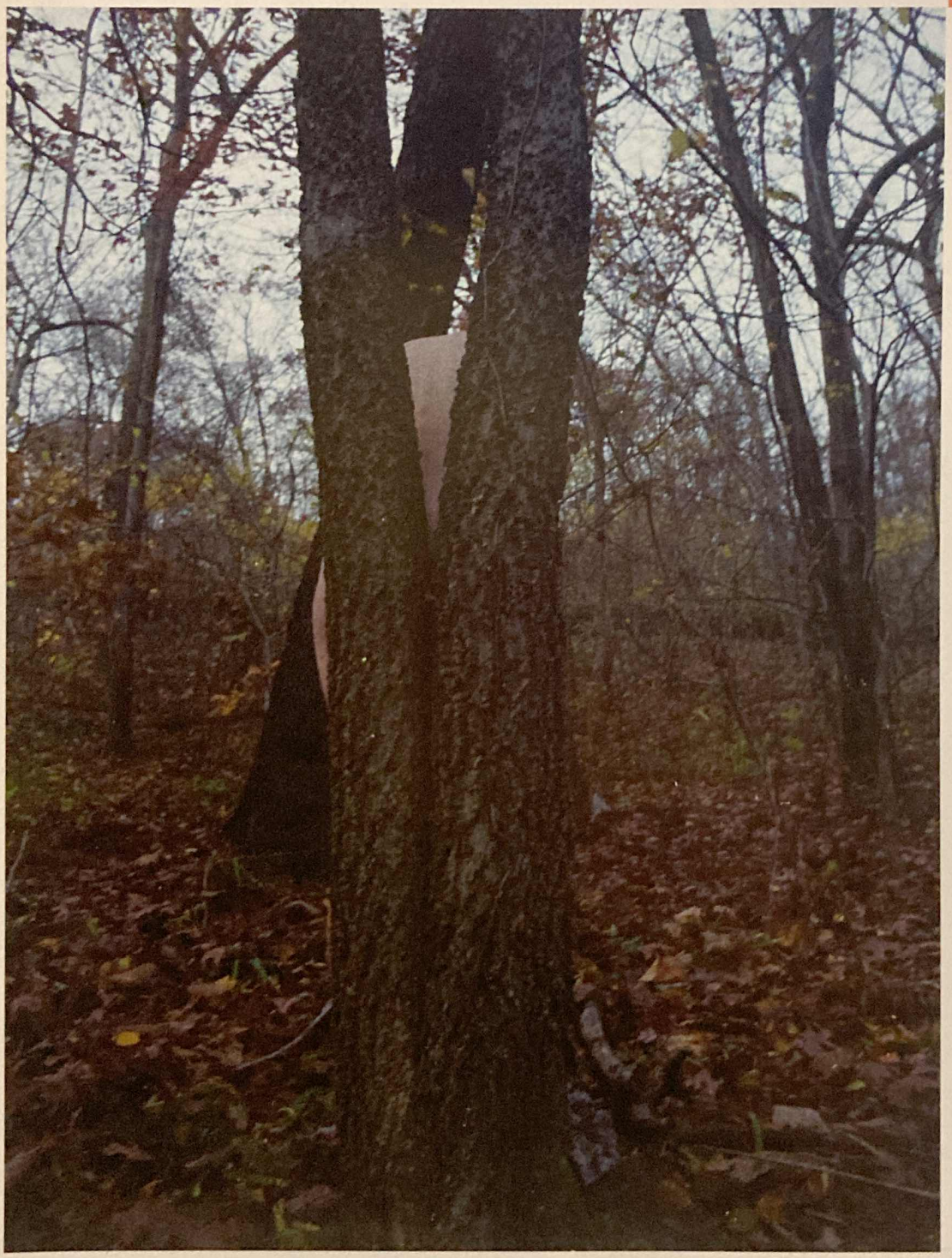
For me when more than one body is introduced into this relationship of space, a void does not exist between these two bodies, nor does a silhouette. Instead, an in-between is created from the space between and around the two bodies. This in-between creates a new body, which I call the "third body," and this third body also affects and reforms the two bodies that are creating and holding the third body's space. This relationship can be seen as an inversion of the first two bodies whose "internal masses" and "external masses" create the third body. This relationship changes not only the space around us and between us, but also the forms of our own bodies.

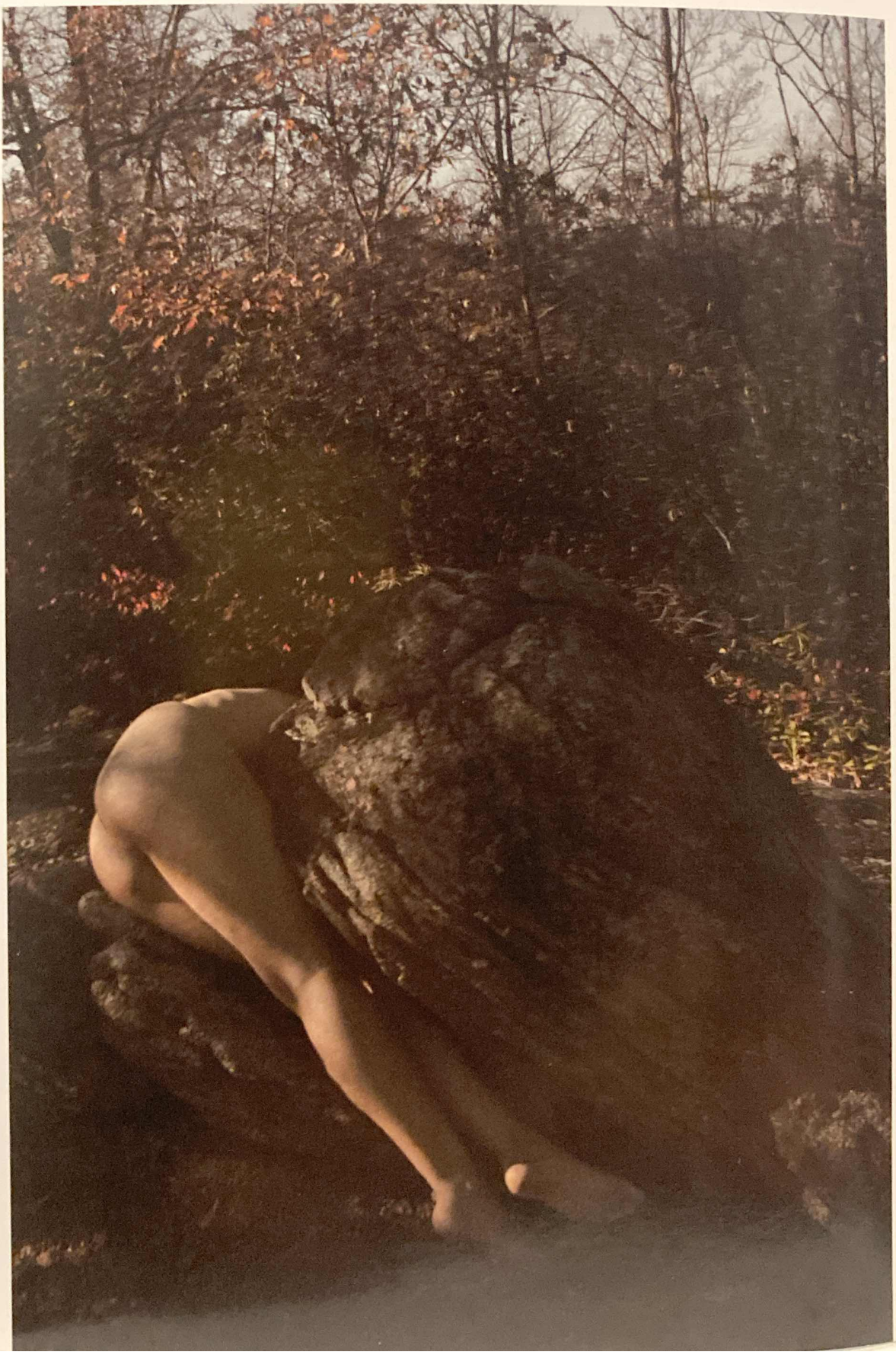
In my endeavor to actualize the space in between as the "third body," an array of investigations were conducted looking at two components: the form we experience as a physical movement and the body we see as a specified form. Some of these studies involved documentation and workshops on collective movements such as Yoga, Butoh, experimental dance; various traditions of walking such as fox-trotting (barefooted hikes); notations of change in light and shadows throughout the day; and my own relationship to a changing body. The work becomes about the process, the investigation, and the change we experience in our perceptions and actions.

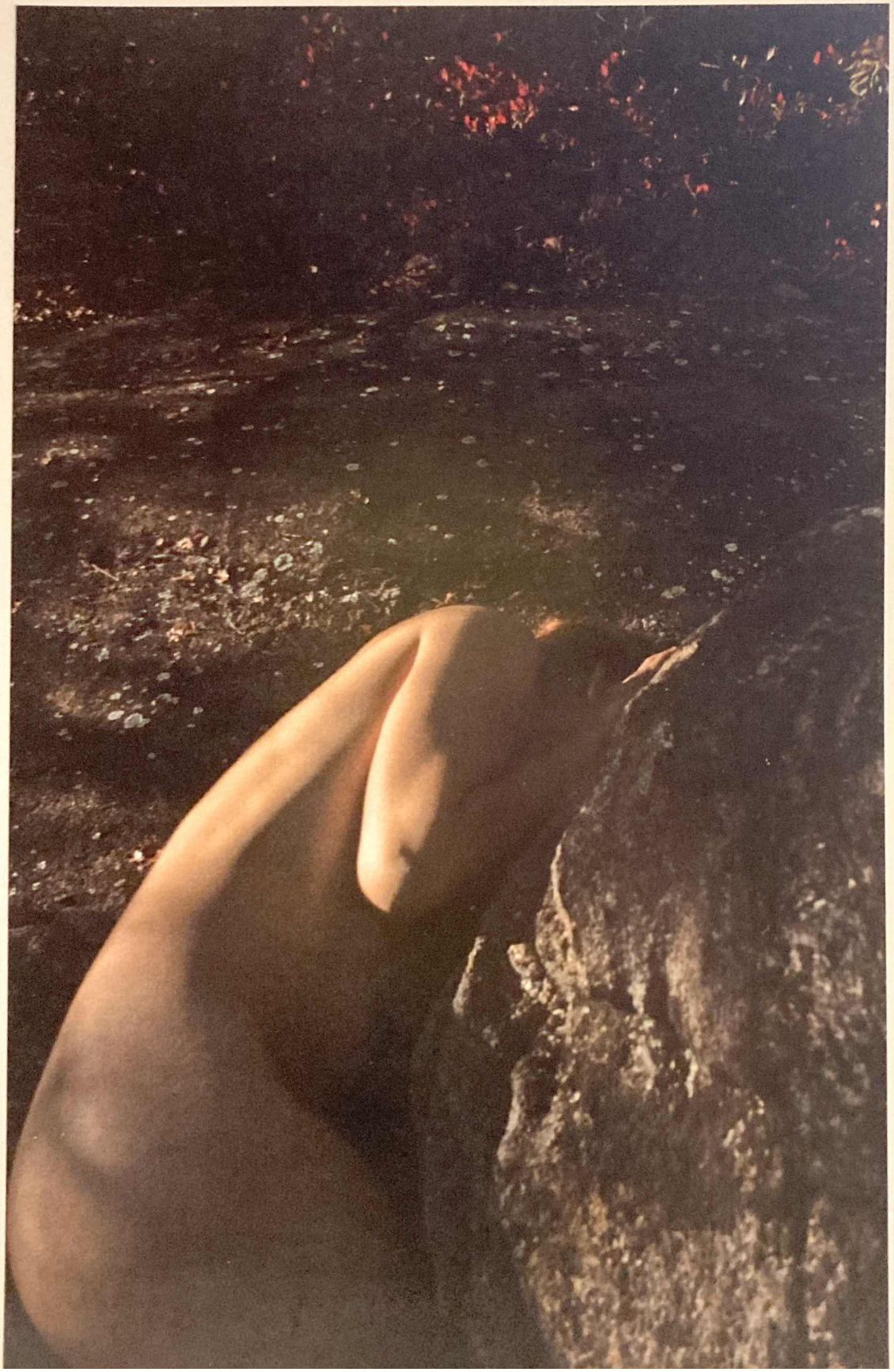
From here, I would like to extend my research on movements to pedestrians—the various "walking cultures" from around the world, the architecture of walking in a choreographed formation. The pedestrian's relationship to the traffic systems and the layout of the city has a direct correlation to the construct of his or her body; hence, in so many ways, these concerns impact environmental design.

We not only form ourselves but also one another and the space. We are interconnected, but also shape that connection, through the space between us. We shape these connections through thought labels, reactions—whether by choice or involuntarily—and these connections in turn reshape us. We can connect, disengage, form, deform, reform, or conform to the space we create around us and in between each other.

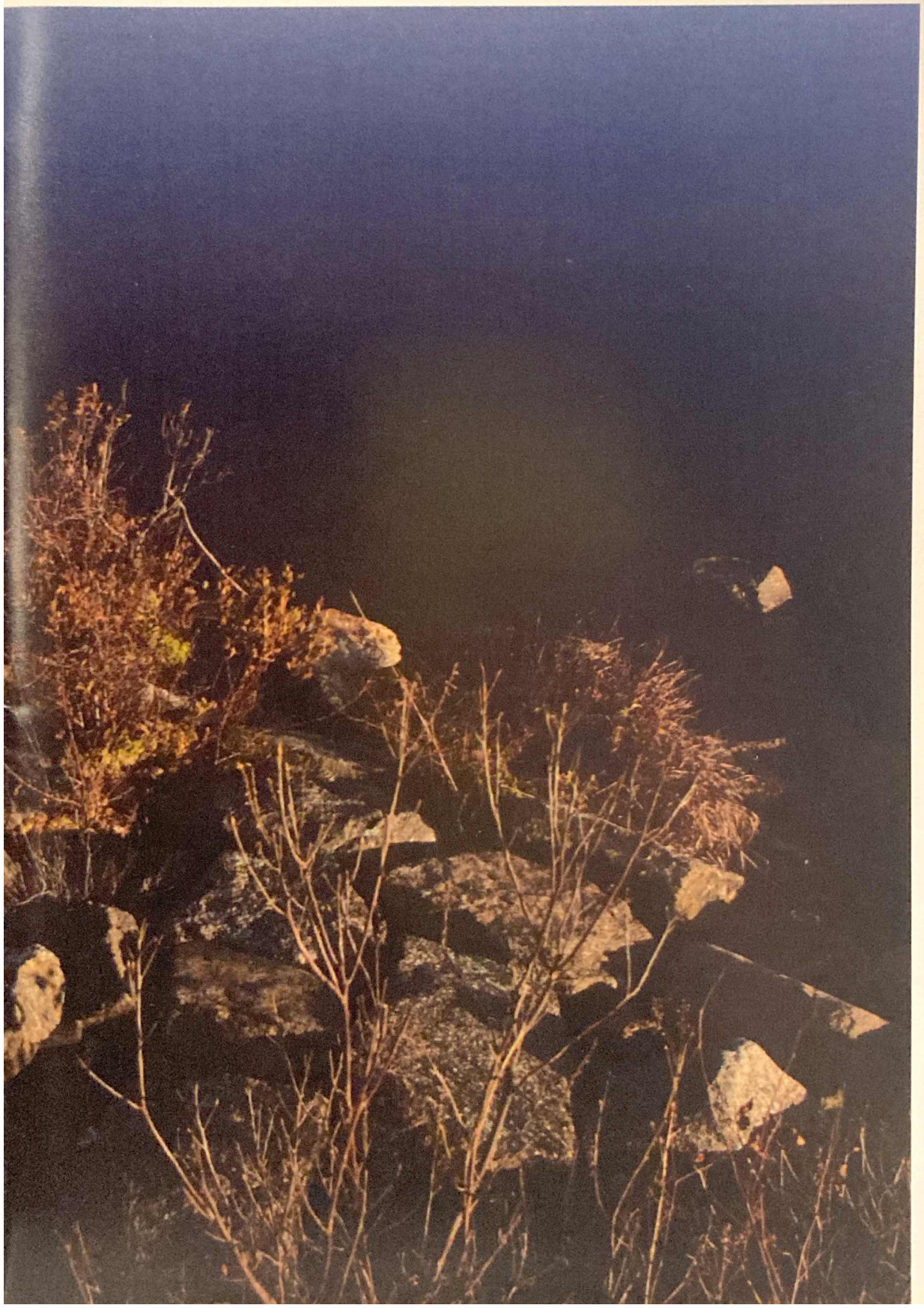
PRISCILLA ALEMAN







PRISCILLA ALEMAN



MNEMONIC SITES

"The book in fact is a volume of solid space where our imaginations can roam."
—John Hejduk

This exhibition reflects our journey in present-day Romania, where we sought seven small Orthodox Christian chapels nestled within the sinuous valleys of the Carpathian Mountains in Moldavia. Built throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, when Moldavia was particularly vulnerable to the pressures of external forces, these chapels have a unique history and reveal ways of understanding the narrative potential of architecture that are both elemental and complex. The churches express the emerging Moldavian national identity through extensive frescoes painted on both the interior and exterior surfaces.

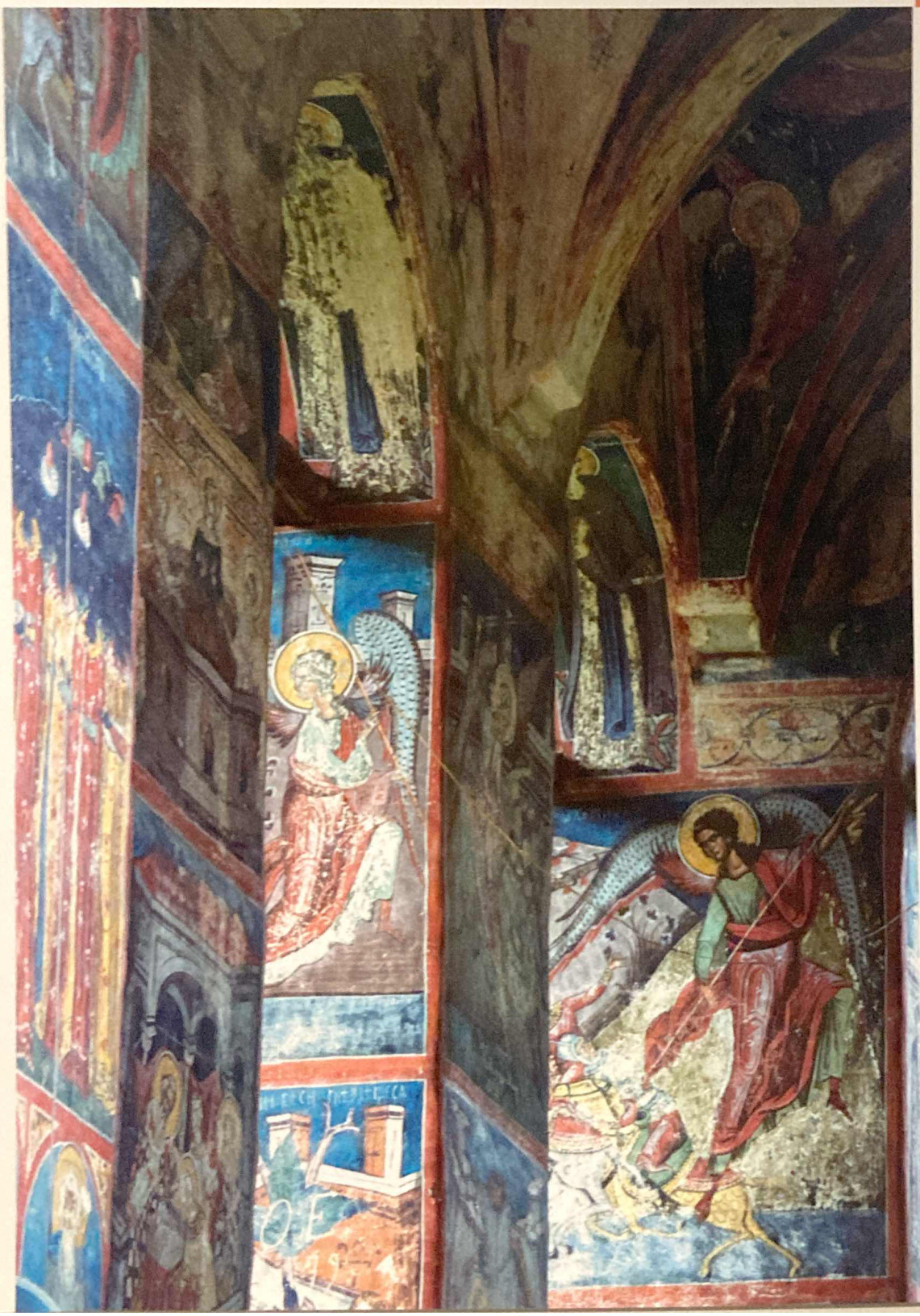
The interior frescoes typically refer to a precise code applied to all Byzantine frescoes, which delineates the scenes of the Bible to be represented and their sequence. The exterior paintings of these chapels, however, are syncretic. They include representations of the Bible, alongside historical events, local folktales and symbols. These composite narratives and combinations of images, painted in vivid colors, project outwards as unique interpretations of origin and existence. They are both ontological and existential.

These inspired frescoes on the exteriors of the buildings were also, of course, pragmatic.

As the population was largely illiterate, the paintings served as visual mnemonic devices for important nationalistic narratives as well as religious ones. Thus, this architecture could be understood as an inhabitable book. The interior spaces of each of the churches are arranged linearly as a narrative, which lead the inhabitant through a series of intimate, contemplative rooms toward the ultimate goal of communion with God at the altar. This trajectory is emphasized by the contents of the paintings which accompany each individual on his or her path through the church. Each room contains a different theme and each threshold represents a further ascent towards spiritual purity. In this way, the walls become didactic scriptural texts to be pondered, absorbed and borne throughout one's life.

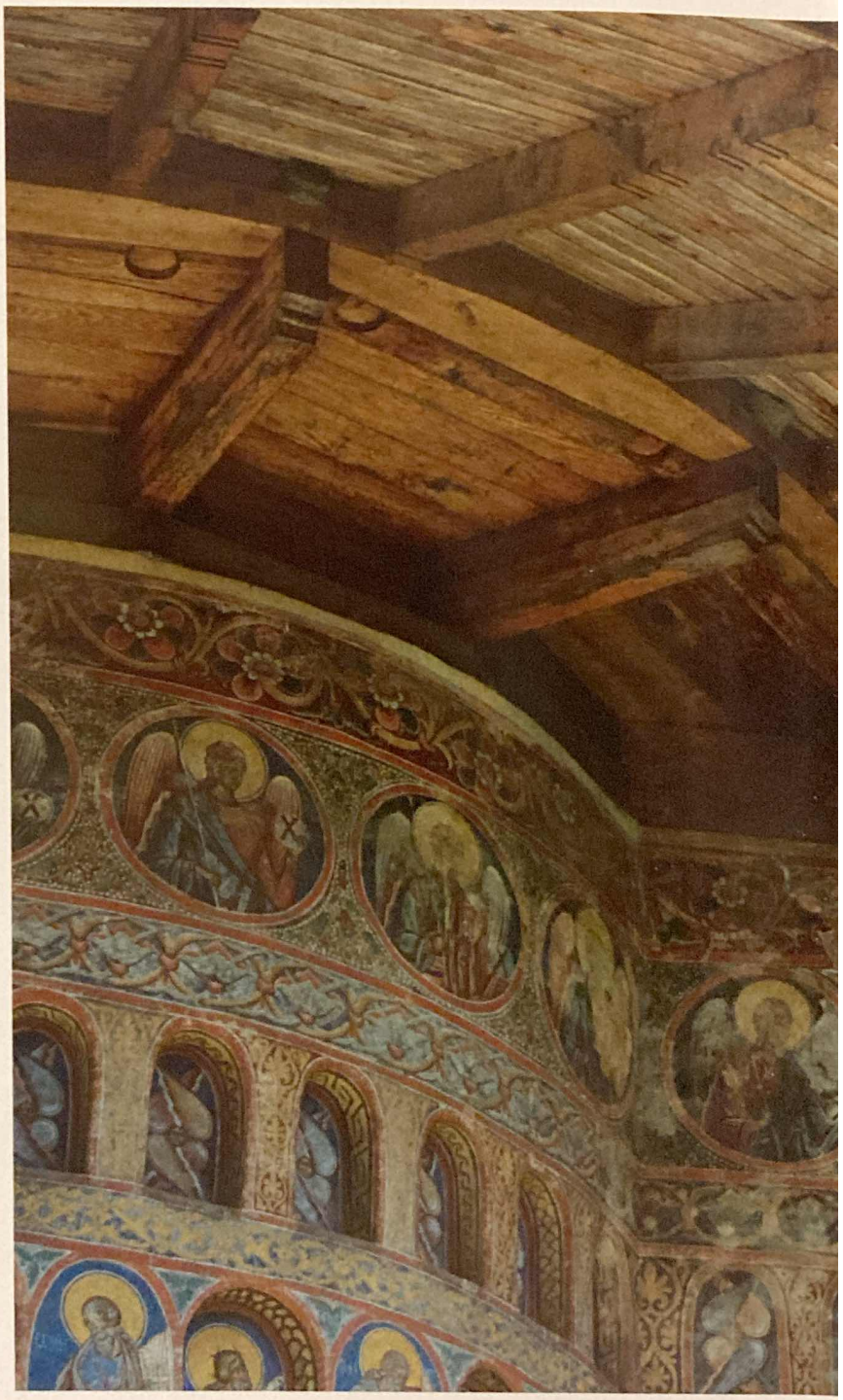
Even the smaller details of the paintings are considered as elements in this text. One of the churches contains a motif lining the bottom of the wall in a repetitive pattern showing an interlocking square extended as a line: in effect a linear maze, a spiral unwound. This pattern is repeated throughout each of

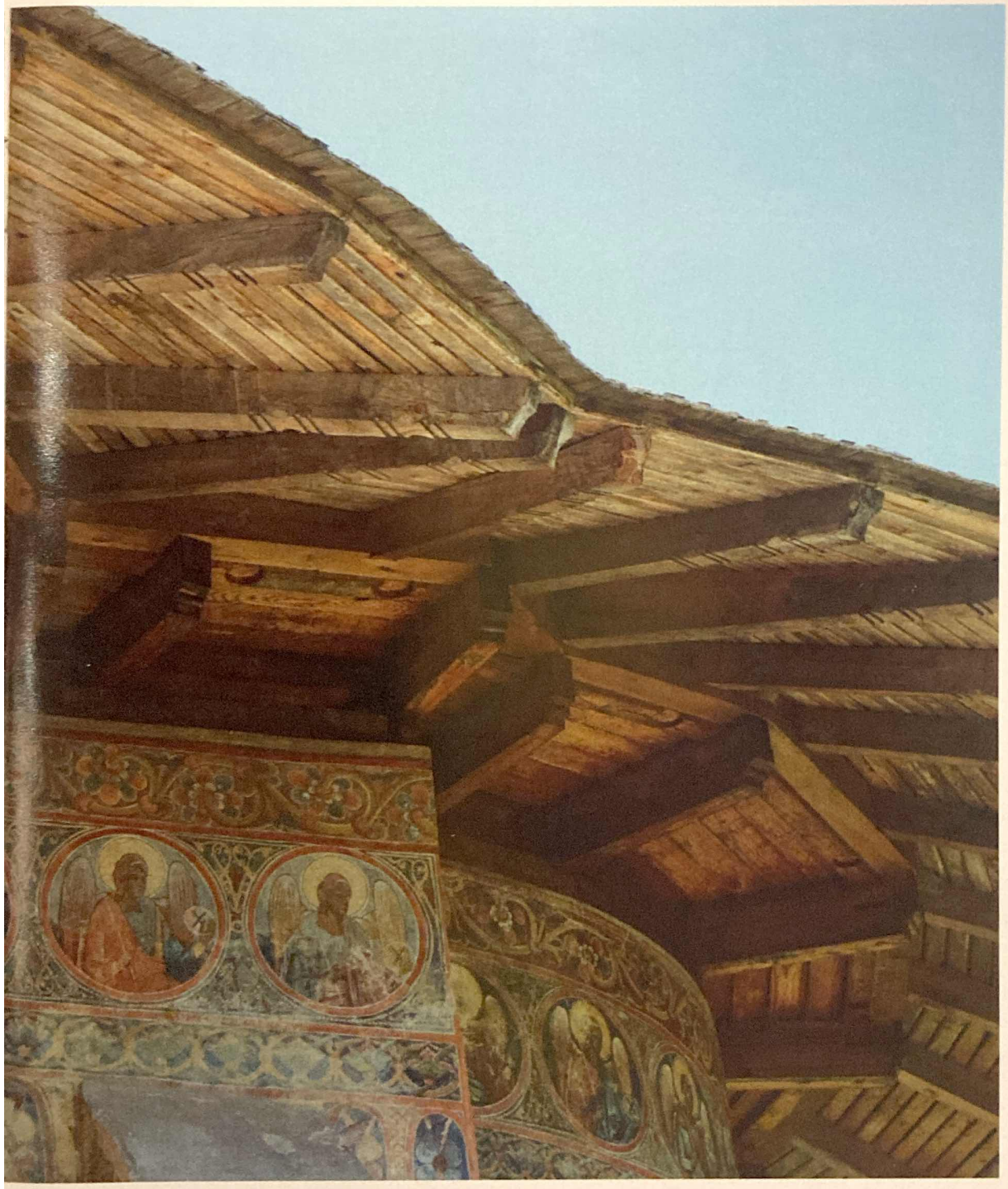
ALEXANDRA ALEXA
BEN JOHNSON



the sequential spaces, but stops before the doorway to the altar, which, literally and figuratively, is the maze's consummation. On the way out of the church, read in reverse, the "maze" reinforces the need to adhere to a spiritual path even after returning to the "profane" world. This is but one instance of a deliberate conjoining of all the elements of the wall paintings, that is, the text of the narrative, with the demising walls and volumes of the architecture. This synthesis both gives "depth" to the narrative and obscures the boundary between concrete reality and the transcendent reality of the story.

The wall, whose most fundamental function is to divide and apportion spaces is inverted by the frescoes: in the case of these churches they communicate to an audience much the way a book does to an individual. Moreover, rather than restricting the narrative component to an area, like the frieze in Greek architecture which emphasizes a structural logic, the Moldovian churches overwhelm their architectural components with narrative frescoes. The result is a space in which the most important experience is that of being a subject immersed in the structure of a story. Viewed from a distance, the exterior frescoes turn the chapel into a sculptural object in the landscape; as one stands before them, they are a landscape in themselves. These churches are a type of palimpsest for the Moldovian tradition, a layered record of history and ritual.





ALEXANDRA ALEXA
BEN JOHNSON

ALEXANDRA ALEXA
BEN JOHNSON

CONTESTED [+] TERRITORY : ARCHIVING WAR IN THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

"Three quarters of the things on which all action in War is based are lying in a fog of uncertainty..."
—Carl von Clausewitz
1837, *On War.*

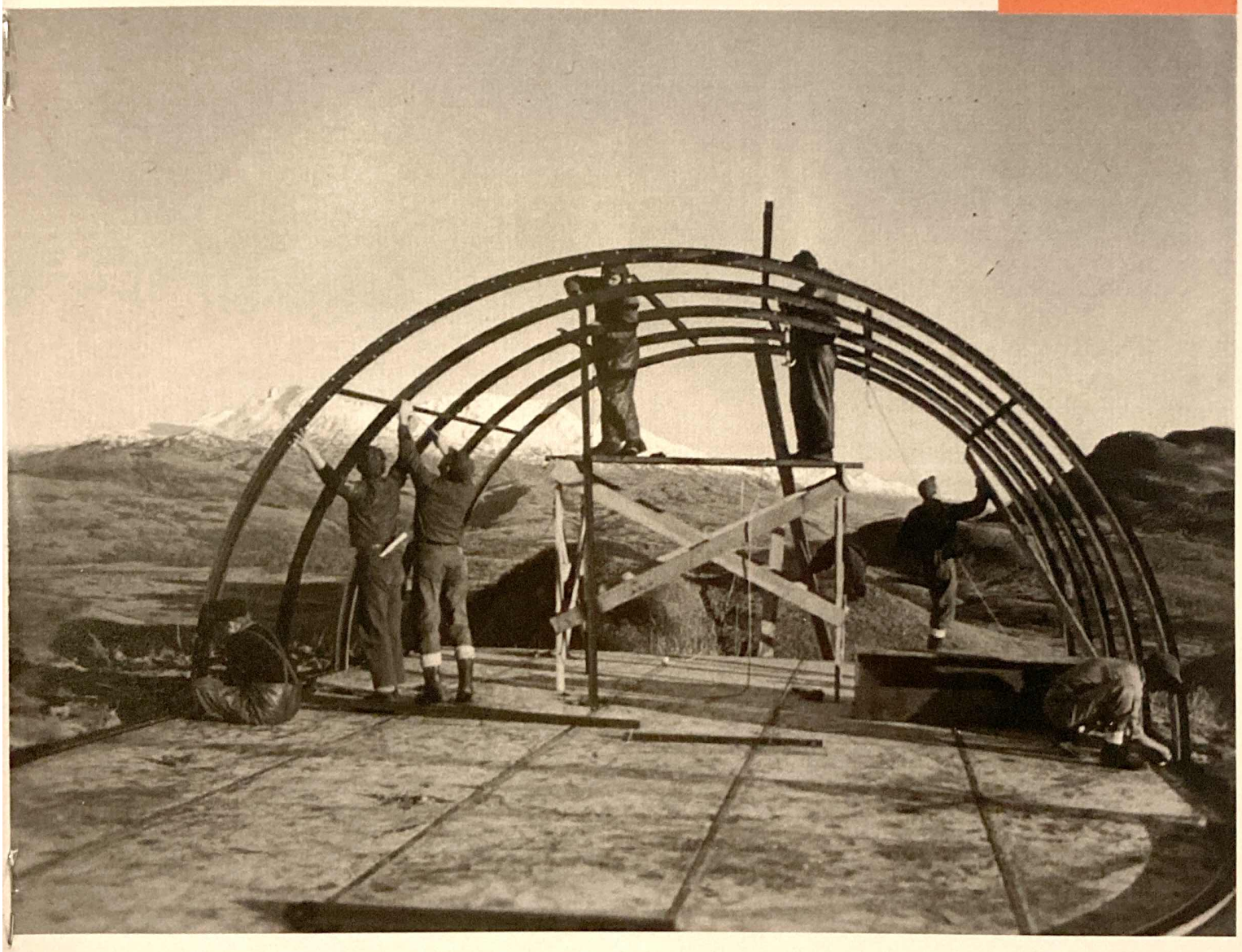
Of all the sites on Earth where the phrase "the fog of war" can be applied, perhaps nowhere is it more apt than the Aleutian Islands Campaign of WWII. The battles between the Allied Forces and the Japanese took place in a forbidding geography of land fragments extending 1200 miles into the cold Bering Sea, subject to perpetual fog, rain, rough seas. And because the islands were formed by the crush of tectonic plates, they experience strong seismic activity. Americans built key defense positions along the chain to support the Pacific war; nevertheless, the Japanese invaded and captured the islands of Attu and Kiska in June 1942, and inflicted severe damage on Dutch Harbor. It took a year to recapture the islands—the last battle on American soil.

Our project encompassed travel to over two-thirds of the length of the island chain in search of the installations, both active and abandoned, of these sites of war. Although seemingly wild, the Aleutians have supported 50,000 years of human migration, settlement and conflict. Layered into the often breathtakingly beautiful landscape is evidence of Native American, Russian, and Canadian vernacular architecture, around which the Americans built their infrastructural and military-oriented works. Of these, for example, perhaps none is as famous as the cheap, easily constructed Quonset hut, which often became quite nuanced.

In proposing this project, we were driven by a fascination with discovering and depicting forces that have left their "bones" for us, so that we might reclaim them and reposition them into new substances. In this way, military sites call upon our understanding and creativity in especially demanding ways. Each site, each war, each landscape presents new challenges. What could be more intriguing than the Aleutians, so distant and so foreign to most Americans?

We started our journey by first piecing together images from the U.S. Library of Congress archives, film footage from wartime, and satellite map imagery. Then, this August, we set as our targets the vast network of bunkers that dot the Aleutian chain, and we took flight.

ZULAIKHA AYUB
DAVID VARON

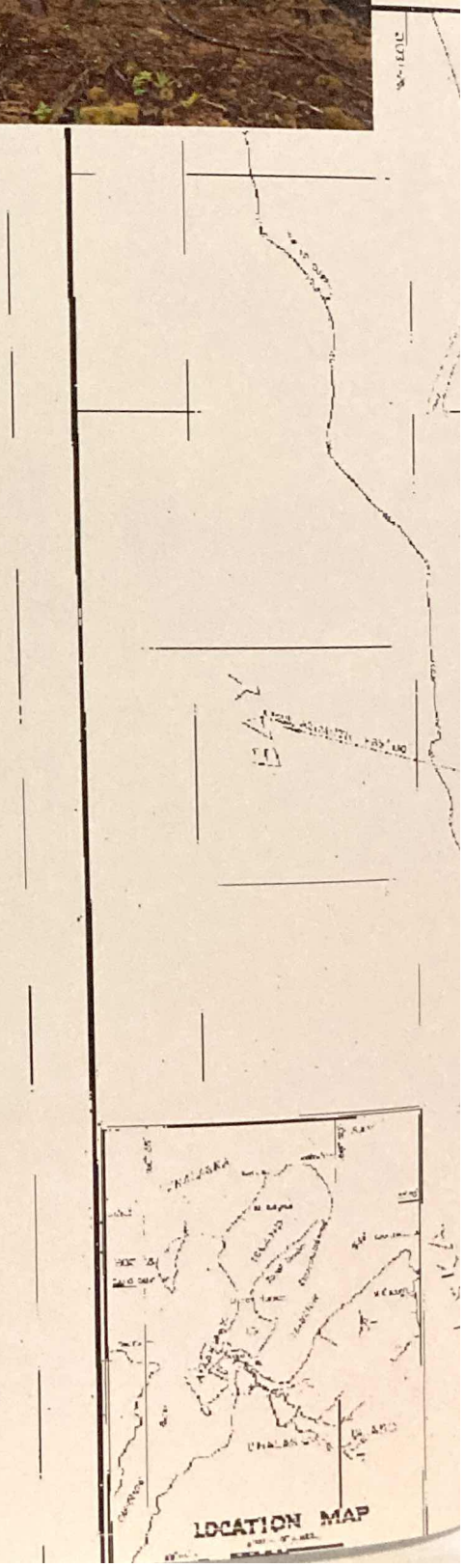


A Diary (August, 2012):

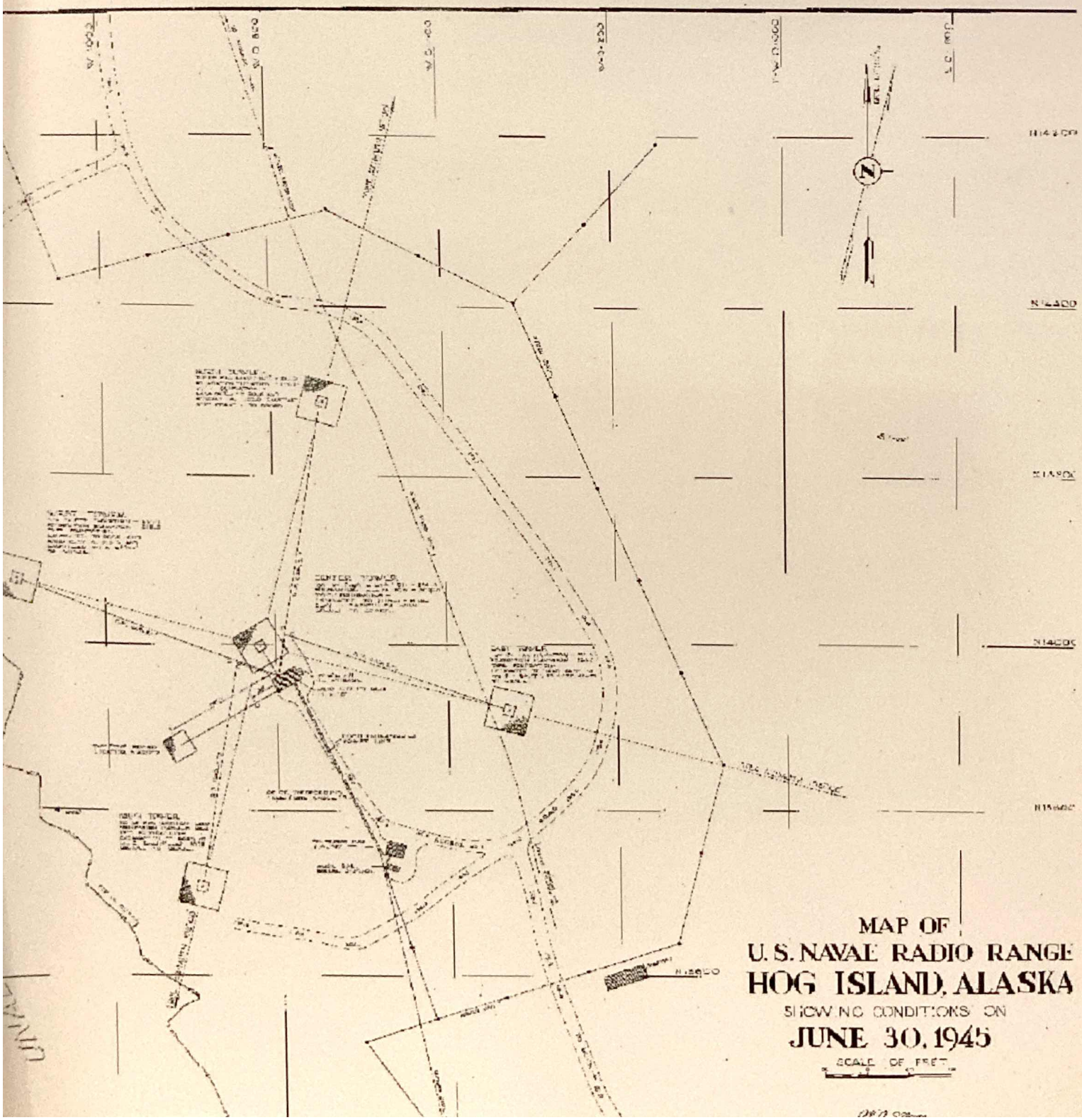
Anchorage: We slept in army housing, under the drone of fighter jets, during 17 hours of overcast daylight. We combed through photographs and maps from army archives and the nearby Anchorage Museum. We shopped for supplies in the commissary and cheered the soldiers' annual mud run.

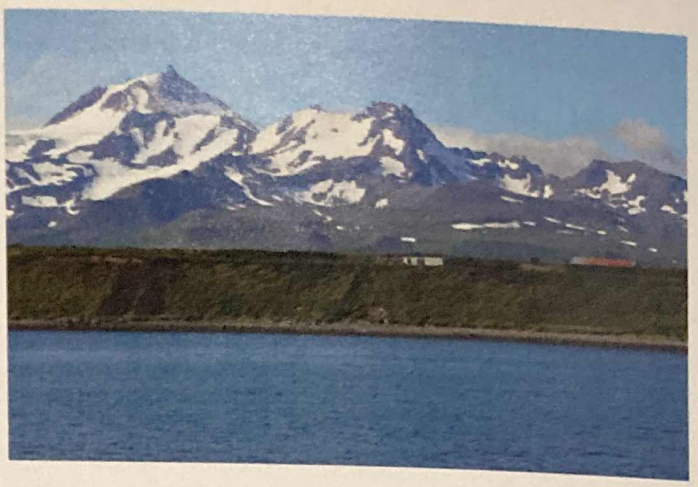
Kenai Fjord Valley: this vision of paradise of pink skies and glaciers, a two-hour drive from Anchorage, disappeared as we entered a 2.5-mile tunnel and emerged into chilling fog and heavy grey clouds. We set sail on the M/V Kennicot toward a blurred horizon.

Kodiak: unusually fair weather supported our 12-day stopover in the collection of archipelagos and the second-largest island in the United States. The "city" of Kodiak, population 6,000, relies on fishing; docks and canaries line the coast. We hiked the dense forest to the edge of the coastal cliffs, photographing bunkers and stitching together their history as Navy Seal training bases and massive Coast Guard fortifications. Many forts sit on private lands that are being mined for their resources; extensive logging has rendered once-hidden sites newly conspicuous.



ZULAIKHA AYUB
DAVID VARON





Cold Bay's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge: a 64-hour boat ride took us to this majestic tundra. The silence and the distances create odd illusions: what seems 20 feet away can be five times longer; the solace is disorienting. A long airstrip cuts through an otherwise untouched field of vision.

Dutch Harbor: emerald-green, unobstructed sunlight, foul-mouthed fishermen, whale pods, salmon, and white-painted Russian Orthodox crosses at the cemetery greet us. Many of the Quonset huts we became fascinated with in our previous research lie in piles of broken wood and steel, but the concrete bunkers are still fully erect.

Our study and our thinking are just beginning.

ZULAIKHA AYUB
DAVID VARON

AND LET ME TELL YOU: A WORK-IN-PROGRESS

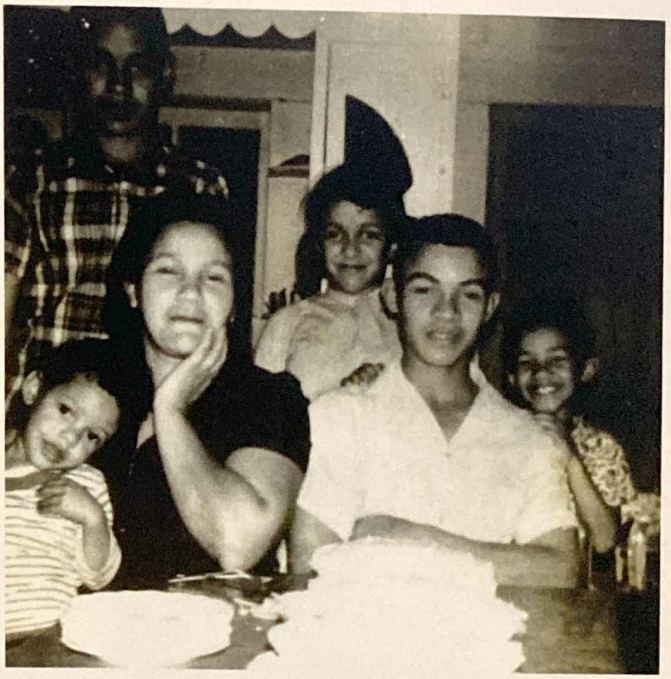
Since I was young, I was faced with the question: "What are you?" And I have grown accustomed to responding with the phrase "I'm Black." I remember my grandmother telling me that I was Creole and I told myself, "then I'm not Black, I'm Creole," and went back to my mother to tell her this. Usually, when we would talk, she would be too preoccupied with tending to house chores (i.e., putting away groceries, folding clothes, putting everything in its place). When I told her what my grandmother told me, she stopped what she was doing and said, "No, you are Black."

This moment satisfied the question of who I was until I came to New York City to attend The Cooper Union, where a group of peers asked me, "What are you?" and again I replied, "I'm Black." But then they asked, "No, what *are* you?" I started to think back to what my grandmother told me and responded, "I'm Creole." Now I began to ask myself, "Am I Creole or am I Black?" I researched the history of both terms and found no clarification. When Creole was written about, the term Black couldn't be found and vice versa. I decided that, instead of researching in books, I needed to research home—where we all learn, for the most part, about our identity.

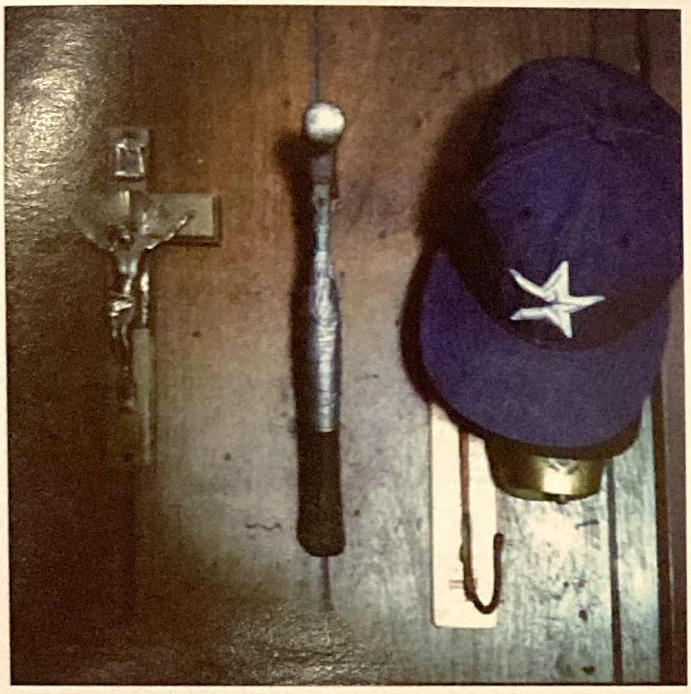
This summer, I traveled to Louisiana to begin the process of investigating the perspectives of three generations of women in my family. Louisiana is a state known for its food, music, and history of racial politics, although what is usually known about these three things is based on New Orleans' culture. This film ventures out of New Orleans and into the rural area surrounding it. The area that I focus on is Mamou, a small town that recently found its place on the map.

After coming back to New York and reviewing the footage that I had shot, I began to realize how much gender and work shaped and preserved each woman's perspective. For this exhibition I present a short film introducing four Creole women, two from Mamou and two from New Orleans. You will hear each woman respond to my questions about her experiences and will see them in their lives in parallel to what is being said. These stories shed light on some of the subtle and the obvious ways that identity is thought about and understood.

ARIEL JACKSON



ARIEL JACKSON

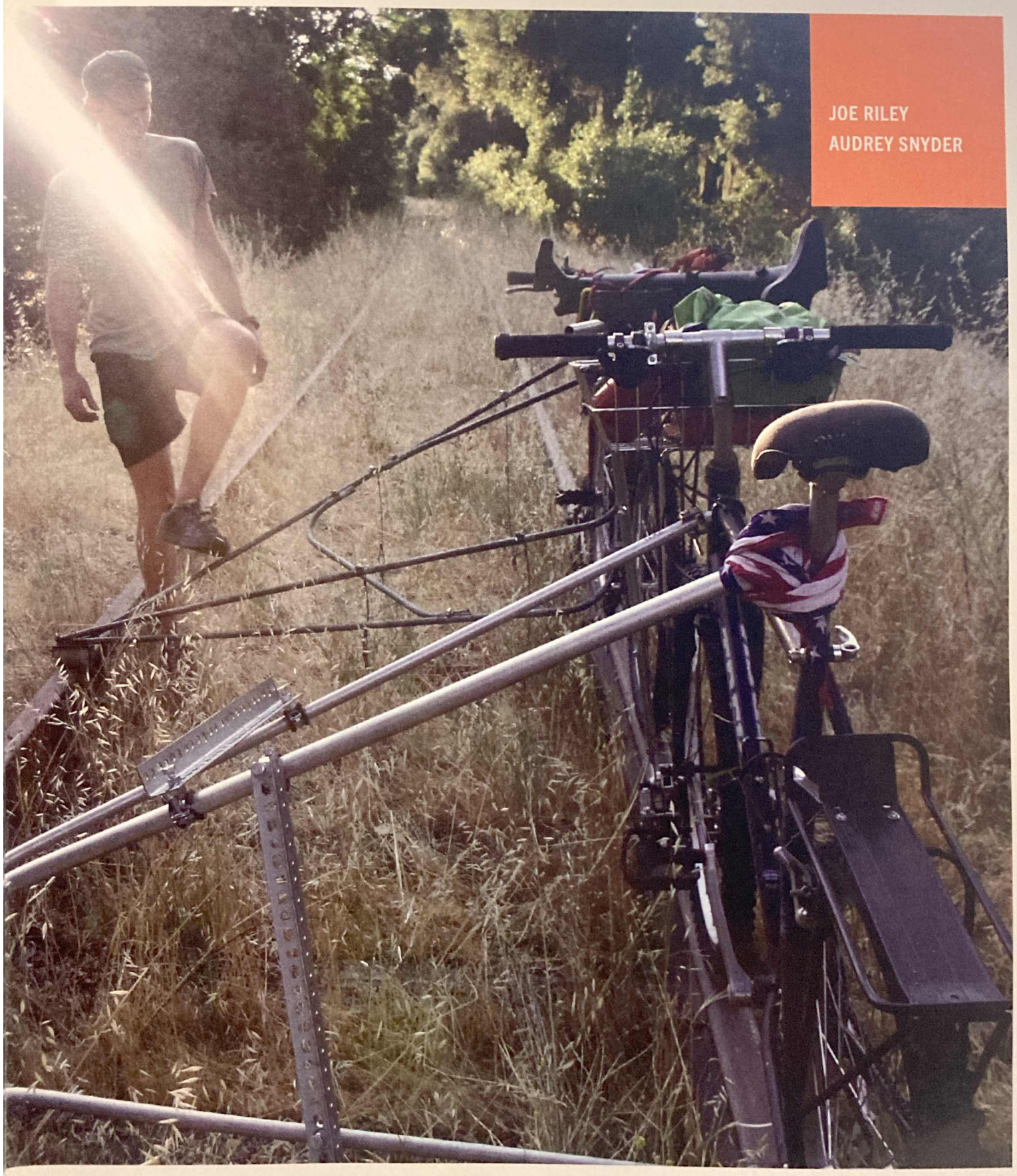


PARALLEL CASES: AN ONGOING PROJECT

For the 2012 Benjamin Menschel Fellowship Exhibition, Joe Riley and Audrey Snyder present a collection of research, photographic and video documentation, and prints from their recent railbike and letterpress journey. *Parallel Cases* traces the concurrent histories of the decline and abandonment of American railroads with the shift in commercial printing from handset type to increasingly mechanized and modern forms of printing.

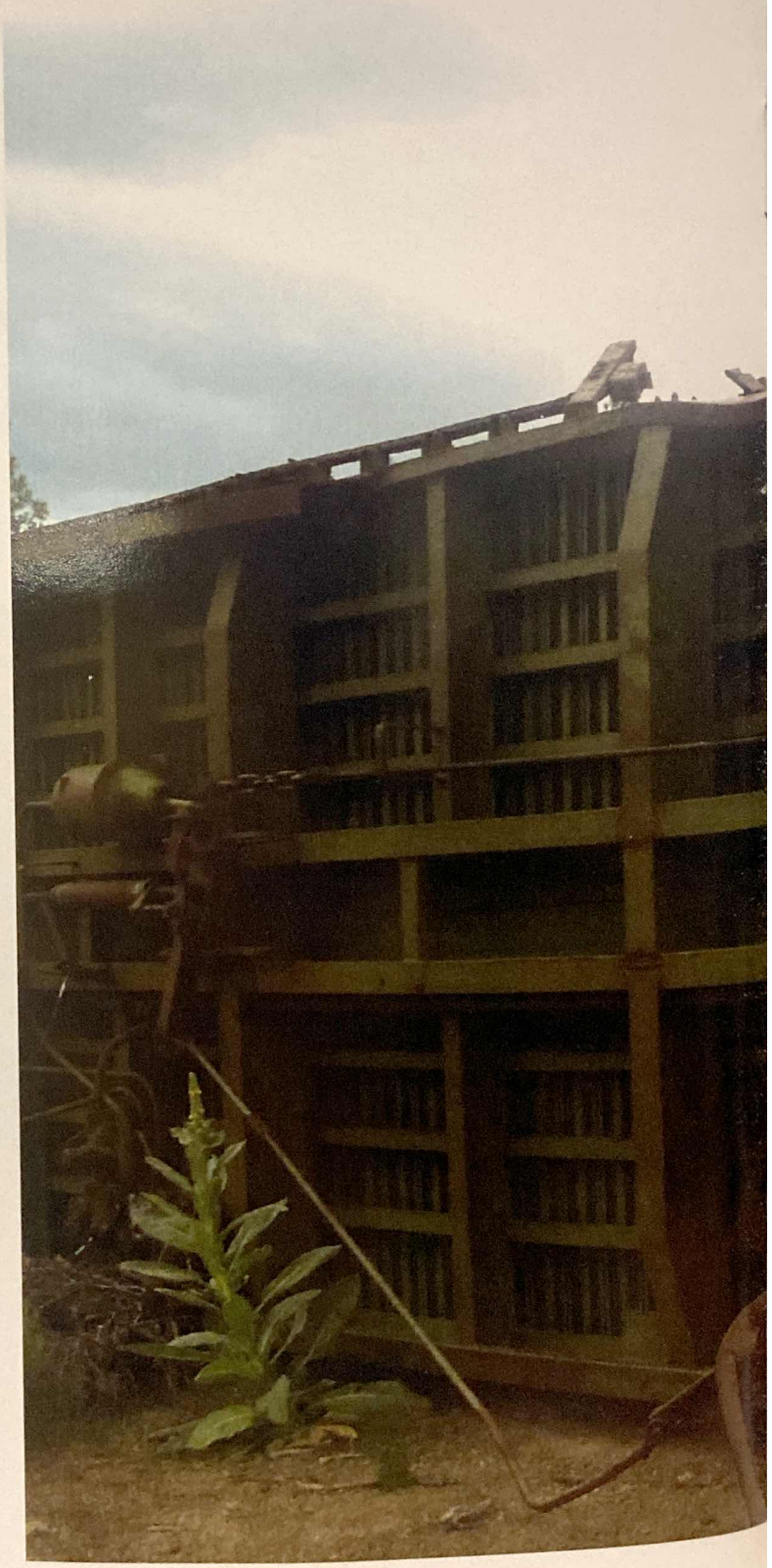
A nearly forgotten point of convergence for these parallel histories of the railroad and printing lies in the tramp printers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the days of handset type, itinerant printers traveled the country by freight train, strapped with their composing sticks and bedrolls, looking for work at small-town newspapers and big-city publishing houses as typesetters. The tramp printer was a skilled craftsman whose traveling impetus was borne out of wanderlust and the age-old tradition of the journeyman. They traveled not only to fulfill a rambling personal desire, but also because their craft required the kind of experiential learning that may only be achieved through travel.

In our research and travel through Northern California and Oregon, we sought modalities of the tramp printer in order to engage the history of railroad transport and communication. In occupying an abandoned space with a reimagined form of transportation, we were able to better understand the landscape and implications of abandonment. The direct contact with the rails and the pace of the railbikes provided an opportunity to better understand

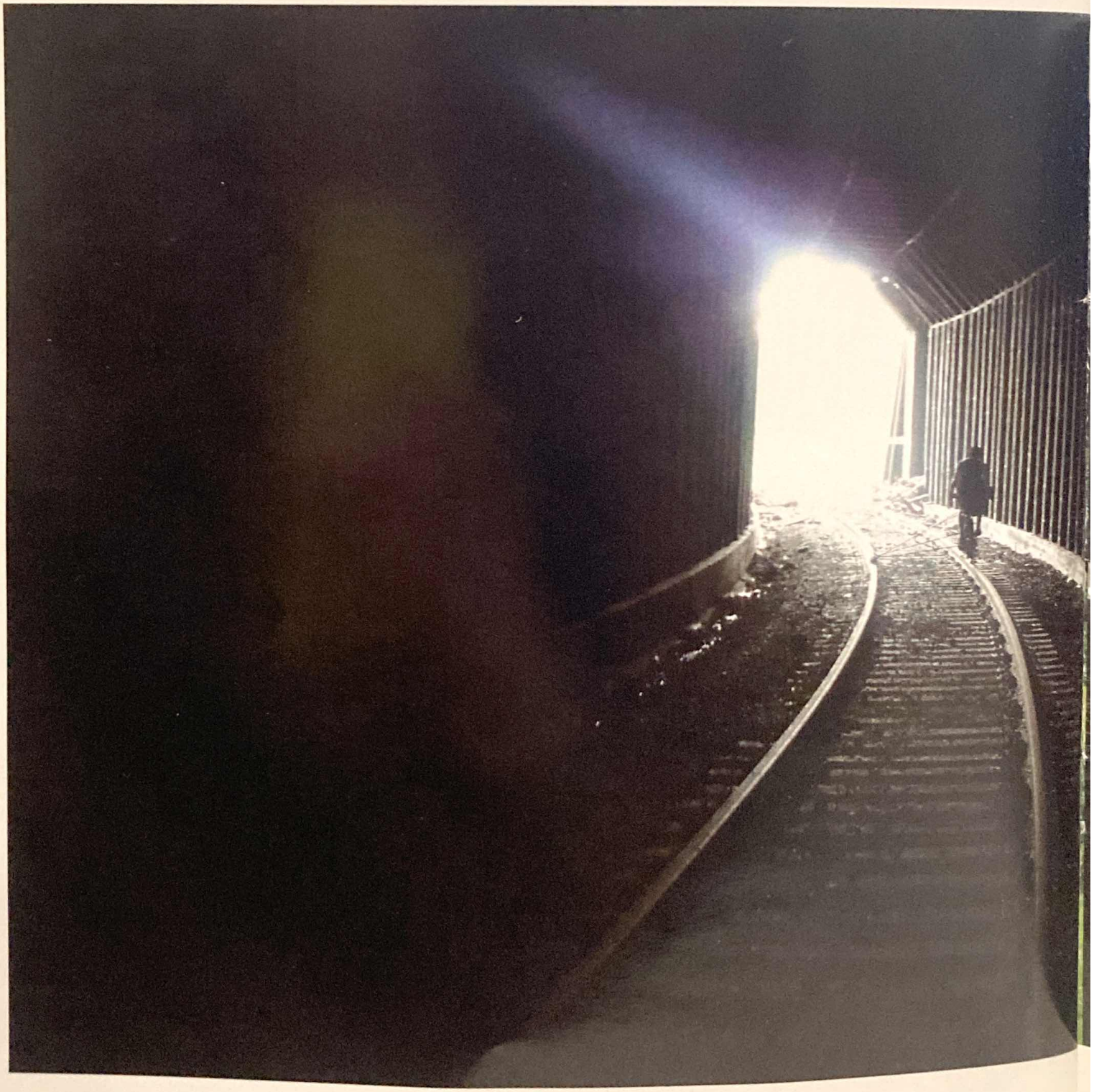

JOE RILEY
AUDREY SNYDER

the shifts and failures that initiate abandonment, which then gradually plays out over years of dereliction and erasure. We saw rails that had been completely altered and, in some cases, consumed by the surrounding environment along with evidence of continued human use, and even rehabilitation, of these abandoned corridors and right-of-ways. We set out and set type to record these findings with our press.

Central to the exhibit is a hand-printed book which acts as a starting point for the constellation of the findings, research, anecdotes, and methods of the project. This array of information explores what is lost once certain technologies are obsolete, as well as how a reinvention of those same technologies and occupation of a place can help us better understand the state of present abandonment. The exhibit does not conclude the project. Rather, it offers context, directions, and potentialities for the genealogic history and connectivity of the West, the trains, the tramps and the printers.



JOE RILEY
AUDREY SNYDER



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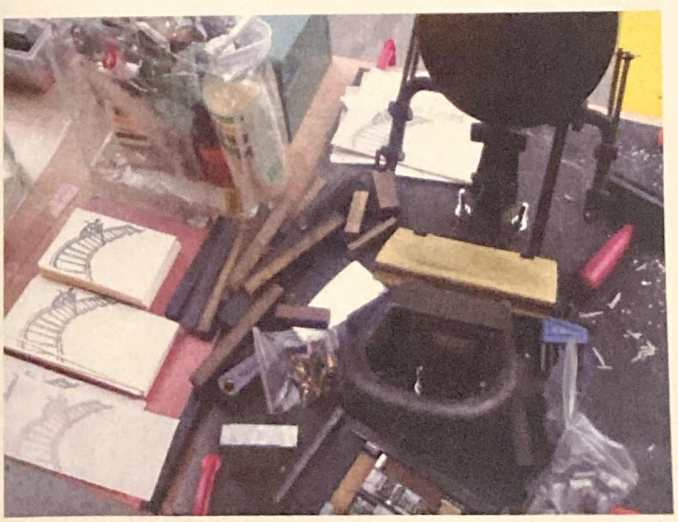

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